

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 20, 2018

Jennifer Kim  
Assistant Division Chief  
Decennial Census Management Division  
U.S. Census Bureau  
4600 Silver Hill Road  
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Ms. Kim:

We write to urge you to provide adequate language support services for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI), Alaska Natives, and American Indians in the 2020 Census Language Support Program. The current program provides limited plans for the translated paper questionnaire and lacks support for any NHPI languages. This will decrease response rates and increase the amount of missing and inaccurate responses to the 2020 Census, resulting in a misleading portrait of these communities. The success of the 2020 Census depends on the full participation and cooperation of all segments of the American population, including immigrant communities and those who are limited-English proficient (LEP).

According to the Census Bureau's 2017 Population Estimates, there are over 22 million Asian Americans, nearly 1.6 million Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, and nearly 6.8 million Alaska Natives and American Indians living in the United States. Asian Americans and NHPis also have among the highest levels of limited-English proficiency of any racial group with over a third of Asian Americans and 13.5% of NHPI being LEP.<sup>i</sup> Rates of limited-English proficiency are particularly high among some Asian American and NHPI ethnic subgroups: Burmese (72.5%), Vietnamese (51.8%), Nepalese (51.7%), Chinese (45.9%), Bangladeshi (44.4%), Thai (43.2%), Korean (42.9%), Cambodian (41.1%), Indonesian (35.5%), Laotian (38.7%), Hmong (37.3%), Micronesian (22.8%), and other groups often grapple with disproportionately high language barriers.<sup>ii</sup>

The 2020 Census Language Support Program supports an online questionnaire and telephonic Census Questionnaire Assistance in 12 non-English languages, including Spanish, Chinese (Simplified), Vietnamese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, Tagalog, Polish, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Japanese.<sup>iii</sup> Census Bureau telephonic support will also now allow respondents to fill out their census form over the phone. The plan further provides for language glossaries, language identification cards, and language assistance guides (video and paper) in 59 languages.<sup>iv</sup>

While we appreciate these improvements and the transparency by which the language determinations were made and shared, we are gravely concerned with the considerable gaps that remain in the current 2020 Census Language Support Program. Failure by the Census Bureau to provide adequate language assistance to Asian American, NHPI, Alaska Native, and American

Indian respondents will decrease response rates and increase the amount of missing and inaccurate responses to the 2020 Census, resulting in a misleading portrait of our growing communities that has serious consequences for federal, state, and local funding, access to services, and civil rights protections.

Below are several recommendations to ensure a full, fair, and accurate count of all people:

1. We recommend that the Census Bureau invest the resources needed to make the paper version of the 2020 Census questionnaire available in the same languages in which it is available online.
2. We recommend, at a minimum, adding the languages supported in the 2010 Census that are currently NOT on the 2020 Census language list: Cebuano, Chamorro, Chuukese, Marshallese, Samoan, and Tongan, as well as Hawaiian.
3. We recommend that the Census Bureau provide adequate language support services for Alaska Native and American Indian languages, for example by adding additional languages to the language glossaries and language assistance guides.
4. We request that the Census Bureau consider using the language glossaries and language assistance guides that it plans to create in 59 languages, as well as the languages we recommend above, and turn them into online versions of the 2020 Census questionnaire for some or all of those languages.
5. We recommend that the Census Bureau provide offline assistance to limited-English-speaking households in areas with inadequate broadband connectivity, such as by providing telephone assistance or bilingual paper questionnaires.
6. We recommend that in all mailings to households about the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau include in-language messages that provide information to respondents about how to request a questionnaire in a non-English language, about how to get translated information to assist in filling out the census form on the 2020 census website, or about the Census Questionnaire Assistance phone numbers that provide in-language assistance.

We request a response to this inquiry as soon as possible. Preparations for the 2020 Census are currently underway, and it is imperative that these gaps in language support are addressed quickly. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ  
United States Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO  
United States Senator



MARIA CANTWELL  
United States Senator



MARTIN HEINRICH  
United States Senator



BENJAMIN L. CARDIN  
United States Senator



RON WYDEN  
United States Senator



KAMALA D. HARRIS  
United States Senator

cc: Dr. Ron S. Jarmin  
Acting Director  
U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>i</sup> Horikoshi & Minnis, RISE for Boys and Men of Color, Asian American and Pacific Islander Boys and Men: The Risk of Being Missed in the U.S. 2020 Census 5, <http://www.risebmoc.org/issues/post6>.

<sup>ii</sup> *Id.*

<sup>iii</sup> Jennifer Kim, U.S. Census Bureau, Update on Language Services Operation (June 14, 2018), <https://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/meetings/2018-06/kim-language-services.pdf>.

<sup>iv</sup> *Id.* (see page 9 for list of 59 languages).